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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the roots and implications of stance, which helps examine the daily practice of educating new teachers. Stance is about the positioning involved in teaching. It depends on a postmodern view of reality as being situational and interpreted, rather than fixed and predefined. In literacy education, a reader's relationship to text is either efferent (to gain information) or aesthetic (to have a lived-through experience). When readers assume one of the positions in relationship to a text, only certain meanings are possible, while others are rendered invisible. This is the essential notion behind stance. There are multiple positions possible in any context, but none can expose everything. Teachers assign students a position relative to themselves when they assume a stance. When teachers take a stance, it aims at shaping, anticipating, meeting, and changing a student's self-perception. One teacher educator had undergraduate students write about their stance. There were several common themes in their stances (e.g., making school connect with life and a sense of themselves as learners). When the students took their stances with them during student teaching, their mentors were unimpressed. The mentor teachers also wrote their stances; they mentioned making connections with families but did not discuss the importance of school overlapping with life. Stance can help teacher educators and students understand that the paradoxes of teaching are worth viewing from many perspectives. (Contains 21 references.) (SM)

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Stance and Teacher Education: Understanding the Relational Nature of Teaching

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This paper was written as a follow-up to a presentation I made entitled "Help! I'm Trapped in a Discourse and I Can't Get Out!" with Jerome Harste and Christine Leland. National Reading Conference, Scottsdale, AZ. December 6, 1997.

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It is common knowledge in the field of language education that a paradigm shift is underway, yet those of us who participate in teacher education know that this postmodern intellectual revolution is painfully incomplete (Lemke, 1995). While many literacy educators have made the shift Myers (1996) describes as a change from decoding/analytic literacy to critical/translation literacy, the schools and the larger public are resisting the change. Whole language has been blamed for children's low reading levels in California, and the new buzz word in elementary language arts is "balance." Teachers are not encouraged to make a shift in their understanding about literacy, but to eclectically use a balance of competing and contradictory approaches in their language arts programs (Goodman, 1997).

As a new teacher educator, I have struggled with the complexity of this context and sought theoretical help in making sense of what happens in the teacher education process. My colleagues and I immerse new teacher candidates in literacy experiences

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that complicate their notions of literacy. We examine literacy from multiple perspectives, attending to the historical, linguistic, cultural, political, and semiotic aspects of literacy. Our students make significant changes in their beliefs and begin to invent new teaching practices to enact their theory. This in itself is incredibly painful and difficult work, but it is only half the story because we also immerse our students in the classrooms of our new partners, the teachers in our Professional Development Schools. These teachers tell the students that the things they are learning at the university are worthless in the context of "real" school. And so the saga begins. Our students quickly see that teaching is not simply teaching. Literacy is not simply literacy. Teaching and literacy are contested cultural constructs.

Given this complexity, new teachers do not step out of our college classrooms onto firm ground. They step instead into shifting human networks of power and social positioning, into social contexts shaped by historical events, cultural and political understandings, and physical limitations. In thinking about this messiness and working in the context of teacher education, I have turned to theorists in many disciplines and found help in a concept I have come to call "stance." This essay explores the roots and implications of this concept and discusses how my colleagues and I have used the notion of stance in the day to day practice of educating new teachers. As a theoretical construct, stance is about the positioning involved in teaching. As a pedagogical act, stance is about active agency and possibilities. It is potentially a valuable tool for navigating the uncertain waters of these educational times.

Constructing the Concept of Stance

The word *stance* has been used in many different contexts, but generally, it refers to how we position ourselves in a given context. The whole notion of stance is dependent on a postmodern view of reality as being situational and interpreted, rather than fixed and predefined. In literacy, Rosenblatt (1938) was one of the first to think about stance. She recognized that readers could treat any given text in different ways depending on their purposes. She described a reader's relationship to a text as either an efferent stance (to gain information) or an aesthetic stance (to have a "lived-through" experience). She pointed out that when readers assumed one of these particular intellectual positions in relationship to the text, only certain meanings were possible, while others were rendered invisible.

This is the essential idea behind the notion of stance. There are multiple positions possible in any context, each with its own set of possibilities, but none with the potential for exposing everything . In the physical world, we experience the limitations of any particular location in a context all the time. For example, a teacher can observe things from the front of the room that are not easy to see when she is in the back.

We teach children to be aware of their position by encouraging them to look at things from different perspectives. Imagine, for example, that third-grader Mary is making observation notes about the terrarium in the classroom. Her teacher instructs her to first look into the terrarium from the front and to draw and list all the animals and plants she sees. Mary does this. Then the teacher suggests that Mary move to the end of the terrarium and look in from the side. Mary sees things that were blocked from

her view when she was looking from the front. She draws a couple new plants and adds a snail to her list. Finally Mary's teacher encourages her to look into the terrarium from the top. This time Mary sees a turtle in a dish that was obstructed from her view from the front or the side. Each position affords her a view of some plants and animals, but not others.

This little vignette is a good metaphor for thinking about stance. In social contexts, just as in physical contexts, we are always located in relationship to other things, especially people, and multiple positions are possible. Like Mary, we can move ourselves to places where we see different things because of the change in our perspective. It makes a difference where we choose to stand.

During the 1996 annual conference of the National Reading Conference, the notion of stance was a recurrent theme of the presenters. Landson-Billings (1996) talked about teachers who successfully teach African-American children. She claimed that these teachers share a common perspective (stance). They choose to see all children as educable, as knowledgeable, and as needing the codes of power valued by the culture at large. This frame of reference, she argued, is the key to their successful teaching. By assuming this position, the teachers level the playing field and make it possible for children of varying experiences and cultural backgrounds to participate in meaningful literacy learning. Allington (1996) also declared, based on extensive research on teachers' classroom practices, that a teacher's stance, her position relative to the curriculum, the children, and purposes of school, is more powerful than any educational program in determining what happens in the classroom.

Bloome (1996) argued that the same is true in research. He challenged literacy researchers to consider what it means to view reading as a decontexualized act rather than a contextualized literate behavior. He noted that every literate thing learners do is situated within a complex system of social practices, and he asked what researchers have failed to see due to their willingness to separate and decontextualize reading, writing, and other forms of literacy for research purposes. In other words, what is missing from view because of researchers' stance?

The Paradox of Stance

Clearly, in the literacy research community there is a sense that multiple positions are possible, and that the particular positions taken up by educators are significant for what they enable educators to accomplish. What is less clear is how educators come to take up particular stances. Is stance as simple as putting a personal theory put into action?

A number of theorists from different perspectives explain why the idea of taking a stance can never be a simple matter of moving from personal theory to pedagogical action. Literacy theorist Sumara (1996) reminds us that "as human subjects, we are not *contained* in a context, rather we *are* simultaneously subject and context" (p.387). Our knowledge of ourselves and the world exists only through our interactions and interpretations of our human experiences in the environments wherein we live our lives. Neither we nor our environments change independent of one another, but instead, organisms and environments cospecify one another. Sumara explains that the complexity of such systems is such that "it is not possible to understand, let alone

predict, their behaviors based on even the most elaborate knowledge of their component systems" (p 388). This means that an individual taking a stance never does so in any independent or autonomous way. All human thinking and doing is inexorably linked to the larger ecosystems of culture, physical environment, and knowledge production.

Lemke (1995) also cautions that our thinking is not necessarily our own. The socialization we experience as members of a community is so complete that we seldom think outside of the ways we are programmed by the culture to think. Cultural constructs such as our notions of the *mind*, the *self*, the *ego*, and the *body* are transparent to us, yet they structure the possibilities we construe in our theorizing. Even the view we have of ourselves as individuals who construct social meaning has evolved across a long history. We are so culturally defined, we cannot escape the constructs we have internalized or the tools for thinking we borrow from the culture which often work in support of invisible systems of privilege and power.

Our theories, which seem to us to be personal ways of knowing, are not our own, but products of shared cultural construction. Linguist Gee (1990) posits that we operate in discourse communities which rely on certain ways of viewing the world and particular ways of communicating, valuing and thinking. Much of the what we do by virtue of being a member of a discourse community is unconscious, unreflective, and uncritical. We think that our ways of being, acting, writing, and talking are "intelligent" or "natural". We are socialized into a stance, an ideological position or orientation, that is suited to the discourse in which we participate (Beach, 1997).

To an extent, both Heidegger (1966) and Vygotsky (1962) agree with this view that knowledge is shaped by the ever-evolving relations humans have with one another, but they also point out that just as social and cultural conditions affect knowledge production, the knowledge produced affects social and cultural conditions. As Gadamer (1990) explains in his work on contemporary hermeneutic philosophy, we need old knowledge and understanding to generate new knowledge. Yet as soon as new knowledge is produced it affects our past experience and knowledge. Our original knowledge is viewed from a new perspective, and therefore reinterpreted and reunderstood. This means that we are not totally trapped in a way of knowing based on our experiences in a discourse. New information or experiences can trigger new configurations of thinking and give rise to a choice about which perspective we want to entertain. This is when the notion of stance becomes operative. When we begin to be aware of multiple perspectives, we realize that we can make choices about what we know and that these choices change our position relative to the normative constructs of a discourse or social system.

For example, Fairclough (1995), who uses discourse analysis to understand how media influences meanings, illustrates that people can assume different stances given the same context. He points out that persons presenting media to the public have options. A news reporter can adopt an institutional identity and present the news to an audience constructed as seeking information only. Or the reporter can choose to assume a more a personal identity in presenting the story and share some aspect of his or her personal response to the experience.

Taking a stance is closely linked to identity and context. Lave (1996), working with activity theory, asserts that the learners become certain kinds of persons as they move within differing spheres of activity. For example, a woman who is very controlling in the classroom may be submissive to her husband at home. Her identity does not consist of a unified stance, but rather she assumes different stances in response to different social contexts and social relationships. Some poststructural feminists believe that an awareness of such contradictory identities can become a source of strength if the subject reflects upon and recognizes that discursive relations constitute her and the society in which she lives (Weedon, 1987). They assert that in spite of being socially constructed, each individual exists as a thinking, feeling subject capable of resistance and innovation (Threadgold, 1996).

This is the paradox of stance. While we are inescapably situated by the culture and contexts of our lived experiences into taking stances without question or notice, there are cracks in the system. Discourse is encompassing, but we are generative. It is sometimes possible to choose a stance that envisions new possibilities and interrupts the text and power relations of a discourse.

By Positioning Ourselves We Position Others

Stance is a relational concept. One can only assume as stance in relationship to something or someone. As teachers, we assign students a position relative to ourselves when we assume a stance. We deliver curriculum and pedagogy with conscious and unconscious assumptions about who the learners are, what they need to

learn, and how we should support them in learning it. Ellsworth (1997) borrows a construct from film studies to help explain this phenomena. She writes about "mode of address", an analytical concept that has been around for years in film and media studies. Film scholars analyzing a film ask: Who does the film think it's audience is? Ellsworth suggests we should be asking the same question as we analyze pedagogy: Who does the teacher think the students are?

In film studies, the thinking about modes of address has changed across time. In the 1970's, film scholars framed the question of address as one of spectator positioning, asking how a film's address positioned its audience within relations of power, knowledge and desire. By the 1990's, film scholars were denying that films had the power to position audiences and to guarantee their responses. Instead, they had concluded that all modes of address miss their audiences in some way or other, making it impossible to guarantee an audience's reaction. Ellsworth explains this shift in film studies as an epistemological shift. During the 1970's, the film studies field was dominated by "structuralism and its notion of fixed, knowable, locatable, and therefore addressable, social positions" (p. 39). By the 1990's, cultural studies had influenced the field to think in terms of fluid, multiple, shifting, and strategic social positionings. As a result, the concept of address became paradoxical in nature, referring to the always unresolvable difference between the "who an address thinks its audience is and the who that audience members enact through their responses" (p. 37).

Fiske (1994), writing about cultural studies and "audiencing," agrees with Ellsworth that the difference between address (who a film assumes the audience to be) and response (how the viewer responds) is a critical space where social and semiotic

struggles take place. In schools, this space between who the teacher thinks the student is and how the student responds is a crucial site of the hegemonic process. It is a close social relationship wherein the social construction of knowledge and learning get deeply personal. "It's a relationship whose subtleties can shape and misshape lives, passions for learning, and broader social dynamics" (Ellsworth, 1997, p.6).

While education devotes little attention to how social norms inform the texture of the teaching and learning, theorists like Wells (1994) have helped us to understand that this social space is inhabited by the "resources of the culture"--attitudes and values concerning what are worthwhile activities to engage in, understandings of the practices involved in these activities, and cultural tools and knowledge about their uses. According to Wells, the master tool is language, because language mediates the learning of all others.

The positioning that happens between teacher and student is shaped by this space. Language, according to our more current semiotic understandings, is not a conduit. Nothing arrives from the teacher or the student in finished form, everything must be interpreted. Understandings cannot be passed from one to the other in tact. Thus, the address that a teacher offers to students is not presented in any direct fashion, but rather through subtle, often unexamined choices made by the teacher. Given what could be said on the basis of the resources of the culture, on the basis of what is historically and culturally possible, it matters what the teacher chooses to say.

The space between address and response is also the space where the unpredictable workings of the unconscious enter the pedagogical relationship. Even though a teacher's job is often framed as one of delivering the same curriculum to all

students, this is virtually impossible. Teachers cannot close down the fear, fantasy, desire, pleasure, or horror that bubble up from students' unconscious. Through her writing about literary criticism, pedagogy, and psychoanalysis, Felman (1982) has come to believe that the unconscious--invited or not, recognized or not--is the third participant in the teacher/student relationship. She says this is never a simple matter and cannot be accounted for in direct terms, but often shows up as resistance to learning.

The workings of power and social positioning in teaching are nearly invisible, but when a teacher takes a stance, even one based on the best intentions, that stance aims at shaping, anticipating, meeting, and changing who a student thinks she is. This is done in relation to gender, race, sexuality, social status, ability, religion, ethnicity, and all those other differences that affect an individual's quality of life and sense of self. Even knowing this, however, teachers cannot control mode address. The power of address lies in its indeterminacy.

Using "Stance" as a Tool in Teacher Education

> To be aware of authorship is to be aware of situationality and of the relation between the ways in which one interprets one's situation and the possibilities of action and choice. (Greene, 1988, p. 23)

We can think of stance as a form of authorship. We are both created by and creators of the culture around us. This situation is incredibly complex because so much of the process is virtually invisible and unknowable to us. Other parts of the process are completely beyond our control. Nonetheless, an awareness of this

situationality and the idea that there are multiple ways to read it, keeps us from being totally controlled by the discourses or power structures wherein we work. We can position ourselves and taking up a stance, like authoring, enables us to create possibilities where none existed before. The addresses we assign to our students and others in out contexts are likewise authored by us.

The concept of stance I am constructing in essay has its roots in my personal experience. As a new teacher educator, I have been repeatedly accused of taking an inappropriate stance. Students who soak up my ideas in class at the university write me angry email notes about the how I have "messed them up." They ask how I dare to teach them to value practices and ideas that have no basis in reality. They feel as if they have been duped into believing a fairy tale, and they liked believing--more than not believing. In the context of traditional classrooms, they lose sight of new possibilities and grieve the loss, becoming angry at me for sharing the potential with them in the first place. And cooperating teachers who have taken my students as student teachers criticize me for not valuing their perspectives and knowledge in what is supposed to be an equal partnership between the university and the public schools. In each case, I have had to admit that my stance has been deliberate and that I am not surprised that it makes people uncomfortable. I also add that the tension suggests there is something worth struggling together to figure out.

I have also discovered that taking up a stance in fairly fleeting work, even when I am in the same context for a long period of time. Much as with authoring, different issues become central at different points in time. And much as in reading, there seems to be a limit to the number of critical strands I can attend to at any one time. Whereas

one semester my stance involved being very proactive about issues of diversity in my teaching, the next semester it shifted to focusing on multiple ways of knowing. I have began jotting my stance down from time to time as way of taking my pulse, much like I take my pulse as a runner, checking to see if I am as much in charge of the moment as I think I am. I found this helpful to me personally, so I introduced the idea of writing a stance to my undergraduate teacher education students. The students were creating artworks that represented their learning across a semester of the teacher education program, and I asked each student to also write a five to seven item stance piece to accompany their artifact. Here are three representative samples of stances written by these education majors as they finished the second of four semesters in the program.

Student 1-- I think about:
-using time effectively.
-being in control of my learning--moving at my own pace through the inquiry process.
-watching children and knowing them, so I am aware and realize when and what to do.
-letting children think.
-not just reading, but rather experiencing and living.
-helping the children to build bridges.

Student 2-- I think about:
-offering students a chance to express themselves in a variety of ways.
-thinking of life as the subject of learning.
-encouraging learners to see from multiple points of view, exploring facts and feelings.
-going beyond what is provided in art, music, and p.e. classes.
-promoting the arts.
-I art--therefore I am.

Student 3-- I think about:
-knowing who I is.
-taking risks and challenges.
-providing time, opportunity, and tools tailored for the learning of the child.
-how errors provide valuable insight into children's learning.
-reflecting personally and having the children reflect with frequency.
-working from what the child knows.
-how the learning that occurs for a child is of greater value than the product that results from an experience.

All twenty of the student teachers in this cohort group echoed certain common themes in their stance pieces: making school connect with life, a sense of themselves as learners, time for thinking and reflection, and a sense of learning as a process or cycle. They took these stances and went to student teach for four weeks during their third semester of the teacher education program. They were somewhat fearless and quite willing to try uncharted waters, determined to follow the lead of the children and incorporate art and music invitations into reading/writing workshops. The mentor teachers were not impressed. They wanted the student teachers to narrow the focus of their teaching to the required skills and to make the children accountable for doing assignments. While the student teachers were teaching, I met with the mentor teachers in study groups and out of curiosity one day, I asked the mentor teachers to take 10 minutes to reflect on and jot down their personal stances. Here are some:

Mentor Teacher 1-- I think about:
-creating problem solvers.
-giving students responsibility.
-creating a love of reading.
-developing creative writers.
-planning ahead.

Mentor Teacher 2-- I think about:
-where the kids are in terms of their knowledge and skills.
-how best to teach.
-the proficiencies I am expected to teach.
-assessing the students.
-encouraging students to express themselves in different ways.

Teacher 3-- I think about:
-meaningful reading and writing.
-the timing and pace of instruction.
-teaching values to children.
-communicating with parents.
-assessing through multiple ways of knowing.

The teachers shared these orally with each other and elaborated, but none of the mentor teachers mentioned personally being a learner or seeing learning as a process. They talked about making connections with children's families, but did not discuss any sense of the importance of school overlapping with life. The mentor teachers were very concerned with how to get children to be responsible for being successful students.

The students and I looked at these stances side by side and talked about the differences between the student teacher stances and the teacher stances. At first, we wanted to focus on the relative values of the stances--how did each address the students and what power relations were involved in these addresses. Then we talked about the gulf between these two stances and how to bridge that gulf. Being in a school where a majority of the children are African American, we were accustomed to talking about the "codes of power." That metaphor fit the situation. The student teachers were disenfranchised like children who speak a dialect of English. While their stance statements provided clear evidence that they were thinking about teaching as personal, paradoxical, and in-motion work--a good place to stand from the perspective of the professors teaching their coursework--this knowledge was not valued in the school setting and to succeed they were going to have to become bi-dialectal. They were going to have to be able to speak as if they were members of the teacher discourse community, to talk about proficiencies and assessment, about instructional time and meaningful reading and writing. The question is whether they can do this without losing their more transformative stances.

Teacher Education Shaped by the Concept of Stance

> The "problem" to be "solved" in other words, is that of how people get to be social agents even as they are shaped and constrained by social structures. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 11)

As a teacher educator, I am anxious to solve the problem of how to send change agents--in the form of new teachers--into the schools. The notion of stance seems helpful because it frames teaching as a relational act.

> Each time we address someone we take up a position within knowledge, power, and desire in relation to them and assign them to a position in relation to ourselves and a context. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 54)

A pedagogy that considers stance and address is a pedagogy that consciously leaves things unresolved and accepts that there are gaps in the system of teaching and learning that can never be controlled. It is a view of teaching that accepts that people and contexts are multiple and in motion. There is no one address for all students or one expected response from any particular address. Rather each position must be met and responded to in ways that do not close down the communication across the gulfs of difference.

Stance is largely about being intentional, about consciously choosing a position, about being a social agent. Stance opens the potential for interrupting dominant discourses. However, assuming a stance is always partial, for positioning ourselves is only half the story. We cannot control the response of the learner to our positioning. Neither can we restructure the larger systems of power and privilege as individuals. Justice is only possible through communal effort. So while it is important to be

intentional, we still have the dilemma of how to invite others into taking up positions that support more humane and just ways of living.

As a concept, stance reinforces the caveat that we must be ever vigilant about our own assumptions. First, we must recognize that we are totally programmed by virtue of membership in discourse communities that reside within larger systems of power and knowledge. And second, we must remember that any perspective is partial. We see and know what we expect to see and know. We have to consciously change lenses or positions as often as possible if we are to have a more complex view of the systems that structure school life. We have to question what seems natural and normal and continuously ask what is missing or what could be different.

Finally, the idea of stance yields a somewhat unfamiliar notion of power. With all the slippage in the relationship between teacher and student, there can be no direct control over what gets learned. What replaces control is the power of paradox, the power of indeterminacy. Powerful teaching responds creatively to the paradoxes of teaching and involves constructive strategies such invitation, invention, juxtaposition, narratives, metaphors, and play.

All in all, working with the notion of stance has been intensely personal because the concept makes the intimate and critical spaces of everyday teaching much more important. I know more about my students--their lives, their fears, and their hopes--and about myself. I know more about the systems of race, gender, ageism, socio-economics, language, and history that constrain and configure them and me. I recognize the gulf between the discourse of the school and the discourse of the university. And I know that none of this is resolvable.

Still it **does** matter where I stand and how I position those who share my social space. I can offer the students an address that they never imagined before coming to the university and demonstrate ways to make such an address a workable site for their future as teachers. I can also help the students understand why they feel so conflicted when they encounter the discourse of accountability and control. The notion of stance helps me and the students understand that the paradoxes of teaching--like the paradoxes of life--are worth viewing from many different perspectives. And ultimately the notion of stance helps to explain why teaching is worthy life's work.

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